

Cougar Connect

All information and activities in this document are from [Circle Forward](#) by Carolyn Boyes-Watson & Kay Pranis

What is the Circle?

“The Circle is a carefully constructed, intentional dialogue space. The Circle welcomes difficult emotions and difficult realities, while maintaining a sense of positive possibilities.”

Why Use Circles in School?

- Intellectual development is important, but it is not the first priority of schools. The first priority of schools is to care for students.
- Integrated circle practice within the school community will help to develop relationships that support and foster learning and nurture healthy emotional and social development for both children and adults.
- It is a powerful tool for that basic community function of working out how we are going to be together, which includes building relationships, establishing norms, and working through differences.

What is practiced in Circles?

- Respect—every perspective is valued as meaningful to that person
- Equality—expectations are the same for the adults as they are for the students
- Empathy and Emotional Literacy—there is greater opportunity to reflect on what you are feeling and to talk about your feelings than in normal conversations
- Problem Solving—operating from a place of confidence in the innate capacity of humans as a collective to work our way through difficult places without expert help
- Responsibility—there is no hiding behind a desk, and no one is behind anyone else’s back
- Self Regulation and Self Awareness—each participant is exercising self-control to make the Circle possible
- Shared Leadership—practice of fundamental democracy in which all voices are heard and all interests must be treated with dignity

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What Is the Role of The Keeper/Facilitator?

- Assists the group in creating and maintaining a collective space in which each participant feels safe enough to speak honestly and openly without disrespecting anyone
- Supports the use of the talking piece
- Stimulates the reflections of the group through questions
- Monitors the quality of the collective space
- Cares about the well-being of every member of the Circle

A Few Things to Remember

- Information that is shared in the Circle stays in the Circle.
- It is ok for participants to pass.
- Only the person holding the talking piece may speak.
- The keeper/facilitator may speak without the talking piece but will do so only when necessary to maintain the integrity of the process.
- Please complete the Circles and the questions within the Circles in the order they are listed. This is important so our entire school is talking about/focusing on the same thing weekly.

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Introducing Circles

Week of September 16, 2019

Purpose: To introduce the talking piece , to begin using a talking piece, and to explore the concept of a Circle.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

“We are going to practice a new way of being together and of talking to each other--in a circle.”

Introduce the idea of the talking piece. “ It is here to make sure each of you gets a chance to speak; to make sure others listen carefully when you speak; to make sure you are finished before someone else speaks; and to help all of us talk from our hearts. You can not talk unless you are holding the talking piece.”

Introduce rounds. A round is a pass of the talking piece around the Circle. The keeper poses a question and, as a participant, answers first. The keeper then passes the talking piece to the person to his/her left or right. It is always ok for a participant to pass.

Round: My name is _____ and I am feeling _____ right now.

Round: Over the weekend I _____.

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Introducing Circles (cont.)

Week of September 23, 2019

Purpose: To introduce the talking piece , to begin using a talking piece, and to explore the concept of a Circle.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: Share something or someone that always makes you laugh and tell us why you think they are funny.

Round: Tell us your favorite song, movie, or artist and why this is your favorite.

Round: Tell us your perfect dinner. What would you have for your main course, drink and dessert?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Introducing Circles (cont.)

Week of October 7, 2019

Purpose: To build the students' and teacher's skills of listening and speaking from the heart.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain: In the Circle, we try very hard to listen from the heart and speak from the heart. We are not always able to do that, but we keep trying.

Round: What does it mean to listen from the heart?

Round: Who do you know that is good at listening from the heart?

Round: What does it mean to speak from the heart?

Round: Who do you know that is good at speaking from the heart?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Introducing the Talking Piece (cont.)

Week of October 14, 2019

Purpose: To introduce the talking piece, to begin using a talking piece, and to explore the concept of a Circle.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: Can you think of other times when you sit in a circle either at home or with your friends? Can you tell us about these times?

Round: What do you notice that is special about the Circle?

Round: Now that you have had practice using the talking piece and seeing how it works...What do you notice about how the talking piece works?

Round: How does it feel to you to use a talking piece and sit in a circle?

Round: Share one word about how you are feeling right this moment.

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Creating a Safe and Happy Circle

Week of October 21, 2019

Purpose: To explore the values and behaviors that help to create a safe learning environment for everyone.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain: Pretend that you have a cuddly pet and that today is their first day coming to school. The pet is a little worried that he/she won't be happy in school because others might not be nice to him/her.

Round: What can you do for your pet that would help him/her feel happy and safe in this school?

Round: Do you think we should try to treat each other this way at AMS?

Round: How did you feel about Circle today?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Exploring Our Values

Week of October 28, 2019

Purpose: To understand how values are expressed in behavior in order to create an intentionally safe school classroom.

Materials: Talking piece, paper, markers

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain: Students should choose a value that is important to them and the way they want to be treated in school. They should also think of a behavior that goes with that value. They should write the value on one side of the paper and the behavior on the other side of the paper.

Round: Share the value you wrote and explain what it means to you and why you chose it.

Round: Explain how the behavior you wrote embodies the value that is most important to you.

Round: How are you doing and how do you feel about the Circle today?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Let's Talk About Bullying

Week of November 4, 2019

Purpose: To increase our understanding of the impact of bullying to increase the capacity to recognize bullying; to strengthen bystanders' ability to support targets of bullying.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: If you were a kind of weather today, what would the weather be?

Round: What does it feel like to be bullied?

Round: What actions make you feel bullied?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Let's Talk About Bullying

Week of November 18, 2019

Purpose: To increase our understanding of the impact of bullying to increase the capacity to recognize bullying; to strengthen bystanders' ability to support targets of bullying.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: Why do you think people bully?

Round: Remember a time when you saw someone else being bullied. How did that feel?

Round: What could you do next time you see someone being bullied?

Round: What are you taking away from this Circle that could help you or someone else in the future?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

Understanding and Living With School Rules

Week of November 25, 2019

Purpose: To help students reflect and understand the reasoning behind “non-negotiable” school rules and to decide together how to comply with those rules in a positive way.

Materials: Talking piece, AMS cell phone policy

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain: Read the AMS cell phone policy to students or post where all students can see.

Round: What do you think is the reason for this rule? What do you see as the benefits of having this rule at AMS? What do you see as the burden of having this rule at AMS?

Round: For you, what is the hardest thing about following this rule?

Round: What could help you personally comply with this rule? What could help others comply with the rule? Are there things you can do to help others follow this rule?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

Understanding and Living With School Rules

Week of December 2, 2019

Purpose: To help students reflect and understand the reasoning behind “non-negotiable” school rules and to decide together how to comply with those rules in a positive way.

Materials: Talking piece, AMS [cell phone](#) policy

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain: Read the AMS [cell phone](#) policy to students or post where all students can see.

Round: What do you think is the reason for this rule? What do you see as the benefits of having this rule at AMS? What do you see as the burden of having this rule at AMS?

Round: For you, what is the hardest thing about following this rule?

Round: What could help you personally comply with this rule? What could help others comply with the rule? Are there things you can do to help others follow this rule?

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Practices for Building Relationships

Week of December 9 , 2019

Purpose: To build a sense of connection among those in the group by sharing moods, feelings and moments of joy and pain; increase awareness of what is going on for others in the classroom; create space to acknowledge and release tensions related to external situation that may otherwise be distracting.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain: The check in circle that we are doing today is an opportunity to talk about what is going on for them or what might be on their mind or heart.

Round: What do others need to know about how you are feeling today?

Round: What is something you are looking forward to today or this week?

Round: Tell us about a high point and a low point in your life in the past week.

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Showing Gratitude and Appreciation

Week of December 16 , 2019

Purpose: To build positive relationships through positive recognition; increase skills in giving compliments;increase awareness of strengths.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: Tell us one thing you feel grateful for today/this week.

Round: When you have the talking piece, turn to the person on your left and tell that person one thing you appreciate about him or her.

Round: How did you feel about today's circle?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Sticking Together

Week of January 6, 2019

Purpose: To encourage thoughtful reflection about loyalty, to build connections by sharing perspectives, and to increase self awareness.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: What does it mean to you when people stick together?

Round: Can you share an experience in your life when sticking together was a good decision that helped you in some way?

Round: Can you share an experience in your life when sticking together was not a good decision?

Round: Based on your on experiences and from listening to others, what have you learned about being loyal and sticking together?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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What is Friendship? Week of January 13, 2019

Purpose: To encourage thoughtful reflection about friendship and to increase understanding and connection among participants by sharing perspectives on an important aspect of their lives.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: What does friendship mean to you?

Round: Why are friends important to you?

Round: What do you value most in a friend?

Round: What is hard about friendship for you?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Picturing My Future

Week of January 27, 2020

Purpose: To encourage awareness of possibilities in the future and to build connection through sharing dreams and aspirations.

Materials: Talking piece, drawing materials

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain: Students are to create a drawing representing the person they would like to be 5 years from now. Allow 5 minutes for the drawing.

Round: I invite you to share your drawing and tell us what you have depicted about the person you would like to be in 5 years.

Round: Do you feel that person inside you now? What part of you is already like that person? What part of you do you need to develop to be that person?

Round: How did it feel to do this Circle?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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What Does Success Mean? Week of February 3, 2020

Purpose: To encourage thoughtful reflection about the meaning of success and to build connections by sharing perspectives.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: Tell us about a time in your life when you felt you were successful.

Round: What was most important about that success to you?

Round: In your experience, are success and happiness the same thing?

Round: In your experience, has success ever caused you to feel unhappy?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Relationship Building

Week of February 10, 2020

Purpose: To help Circle members know each other better and to build trust.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: What would you like others to know about you?

Round: What is something you value about your family that helps shape who you are today?

Round: What is something you learned about others that interested or surprised you?

Round: Share one word that sums up how you are feeling right now.

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Choosing Trustworthy Friends

Week of February 24, 2020

Purpose: To think about how to choose friends who are trustworthy and will be a positive influence on your lives.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: What does trust mean to you?

Round: Why is trust important?

Round: Name at least 2 benefits you get from trusting your friends.

Round: How did you like Circle today?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Choosing Trustworthy Friends (cont.)

Week of March 2, 2020

Purpose: To think about how to choose friends who are trustworthy and will be a positive influence in your lives.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: How can you tell if someone you are friends with is someone you can trust? What are signs that someone is trustworthy?

Round: What are signs that someone is not trustworthy?

Round: We don't choose our family, but we do choose our friends. Do you think you should form a relationship/friendship with someone who gives you signs they may not be trustworthy?

Round: Are there things you can do to make yourself more trustworthy as a friend?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Listening to the Silence

Week of March 16, 2020

Purpose: To increase emotional literacy by increasing the ability to be still and become aware of the inner state of self.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain: We are going to explore the experience of being silent. What do we notice when we listen to the silence of no one talking? Take a deep breath and exhale slowly. When you finish exhaling, close your eyes to focus on your ears. Continue to breathe deeply and focus your attention on your ears. Notice your ears. Put all your attention on your ears. Listen, listen. I will stop talking and we will all be silent for one minute. Notice what you hear even though no one is talking.

Observe one minute of silence.

Now I invite you to open your eyes.

Round: What did you notice with your ears when no one was talking?

Explain: This time we will listen to our own body and mind. Close your eyes. Focus your attention on your insides--the inside of your body and the inside of your mind. With your eyes closed notice your heart, feel it beat, notice your lungs, feel them breathe, notice your feelings. I will stop talking for one minute and we will be silent noticing what is happening inside us.

Observe one minute of silence.

Now I invite you to open your eyes.

Round: What did you notice about your insides when we were all silent?

Round: How did it feel to do this circle?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Dealing With Inside and Outside Hurts

Week of March 23, 2020

Purpose: To increase emotional literacy by providing a framework to talk about non-physical hurts.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain: Different kinds of hurts happen to us. Some hurts are physical, like cuts or bruises or headaches. Some hurts are to our hearts and feelings.

Round: Who do you go to when you feel hurt on the outside? Who do you go to when you feel hurt on the inside?

Round: What kind of hurts cause hurt to our hearts?

Round: What has helped you to feel better when you have experienced a hurt to your heart?

Round: What could you do to help someone who has a hurt to his or her heart?

Round: Thank you so much for the good ideas you have about helping someone who has a hurt in their heart. Do you have anything else you would like to say about our Circle today?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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What Motivates You? Week of March 30, 2020

Purpose: To help students reflect on the struggles and sources of their motivations, especially for long term goals such as going to college. The goal of this Circle is to learn from others' experiences and to help students find ways to ask for the help and support they need.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain: The dictionary defines “motivation” as a force or influence that causes someone to do something. Another definition is the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way. The purpose of the Circle today is to talk about how each of us finds the motivation to do homework or study for a test—as well as other necessary tasks—even though they are difficult or unpleasant. How do we get ourselves to do what we know we need to do when other parts of ourselves would rather sleep, watch TV, play video games, or talk on the phone with our friends.

Round: What are forces or influences that help you get your homework done when you would rather do something else? What are some of the forces that get in your way?

Round: What do you need that would help you be more motivated? What would you need from others? What would you need from yourself?

Round: What are 2 things you could do to get the support and help you need to stay motivated in school?

Round: What can you take away from Circle today?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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What Triggers Your Anger?

Week of April 20, 2020

Purpose: To increase emotional literacy by increasing the ability to recognize and talk about feelings of anger.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain: In our Circle today we are going to explore some strong feelings.

Round: What are some situations that cause you to laugh really hard?

Round: What are some situations where you get angry?

Round: What do you do with angry feelings?

Round: In your life, has anger ever been helpful? Has anger ever gotten you in trouble?

Round: How can you express your anger in a way that does not get you in trouble or make things worse?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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What Are You Worried About? Week of April 27, 2020

Purpose: To increase emotional literacy by increasing awareness of anxieties and the ability to talk about them?

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain: In this Circle, we are going to explore what gives us hope and what causes us to worry.

Round: If you were a kind of weather today, what would the weather be?

Round: What does it feel like to be bullied?

Round: What actions make you feel bullied?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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Being Left Out

Week of May 4, 2020

Purpose: To talk about the experience of social exclusion, to develop awareness of the common but hurtful social dynamics of exclusion, and to help the group develop social practices that prevent these dynamics.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: In your experience, what does it feel like to be left out?

Round: Can you share a time when you felt left out?

Round: What can you do next time you see someone being left out?

Round: How did you like the Circle today?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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The Impact of Gossip

Week of May 11, 2020

Purpose: To increase our understanding of the impact of gossip; to increase our capacity to resist the temptation to gossip; to strengthen relationships.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: Tell us one or two words that come to mind when you hear the word gossip.

Round: Think about a time when you spread gossip about someone else. What feelings do you notice in yourself right now, thinking about that time?

Round: What forms of gossip do you consider most harmful?

Thank everyone for participating in the Circle.

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The Impact of Gossip (cont.)

Week of May 11, 2020

Purpose: To increase our understanding of the impact of gossip; to increase our capacity to resist the temptation to gossip; to strengthen relationships.

Materials: Talking piece

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. Everyone can also sit on the floor if this is comfortable for everyone.

Mindfulness Moment: Welcome to the space of the Circle. Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.

Explain:

Round: What personal harm have you experienced or observed from gossip?

Round: Are there any benefits to gossip?

Round: When is sharing something that happened or telling a story about someone else not gossip?

Round: How can you get out of a gossip conversation?

Round: What can you take from today's Circle that could be helpful in the future?

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May 18, 2020